

Workload Experienced by General Ward Nurses and Its Impact to Patient Safety

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ABSTRACT

Nursing workload and its effects on the quality of nursing care are major concerns for nurses. This qualitative study explored and understood the lived experiences of general ward nurses on workload that will impact patient safety while ensuring quality of care. The study utilized the qualitative descriptive phenomenological design. Guided by Collaizi Method to capture nurses' lived experiences. Data were collected through semi-structured (in-depth) interviews with nine general ward nurses from diverse hospital settings. The thematic analysis revealed four themes: physical and psychological, emotional, spiritual, and social. The analysis revealed that general ward nurses experience workload challenges primarily due to staffing shortages and resource limitations. These conditions significantly affect patient safety and quality of care by increasing the risk of errors, delays, and missed care. However, nurses employ adaptive coping strategies such as teamwork, prioritization, and emotional support to manage their responsibilities. Finally, participants strongly advocate for systemic and organizational reforms, particularly improved staffing ratios and stronger support systems, to ensure both nurse well-being and patient safety, and provide empirical insights for healthcare institutions and policymakers in developing strategies to improve workload management, continuity of care, and patient safety.

Keywords: Workload, general ward nurses, lived experiences, patient safety, quality of health care, support system.

INTRODUCTION

Care is the core of the nursing profession and the main factor that distinguishes nursing from other health-related professions. High-quality nursing care means providing easy, accessible care by competent, qualified nurses. Nursing workload and its effects on the quality of nursing care are a major concern for nurses; factors that mediate the relationship between workload and the quality of nursing care have not been extensively studied. One of the obstacles to providing quality healthcare services to achieve universal coverage is the worldwide shortage of the nursing workforce. The increased workload on nurses has had many negative impacts, including reduced quality of nursing care. (Tamata & Mohammadnezhad, 2022).

Statement of the Problem

What are the lived experiences of general ward nurses regarding workload in their clinical practice, and how will it impact patient safety while ensuring quality of care?

Specifically, this study sought to answer the questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of general ward nurses regarding workload in their clinical practice?
2. How do general ward nurses perceive the effects of workload on patient safety and quality of care provided?
3. What coping strategies do general ward nurses employ to manage excessive workload while maintaining patient safety?
4. What recommendations can be derived from lived experiences of general ward nurses to improve workload management and enhance patient safety?

Scope and Delimitations

The researcher's goal is to identify and explore the personal experiences and individual perspectives of nurses actively practicing in the general ward, including the challenges and workload they encounter during their am/pm shifts and how these impact patient safety. Of the fifteen general ward nurses, only ten participated; the five who were refused cited busy schedules and on-duty challenges during the interview. It was done using a qualitative descriptive exploratory research study design through a formulated semi-structured (in-depth) interview, and documented by an audio recording.

Review of Related Literature

Nurses' workload was due to organizational aspects and professional recognition, such as hospitals, which were obtained for physical working conditions, pay rate, variety of tasks performed in their jobs, the amount of responsibility they were given, and the chance of Promotion (Hellín Gil et al., 2022). Other research indicates that physical and mental demands cause the workload nurses experience, which reduces overall performance and hinders the quality of nursing care. (Babamohamadi et al., 2023).

Theoretical Framework

Florence Nightingale's Nursing Theory: Environmental Theory. The nurse promotes, advocates for, and protects the patient's health and safety by ensuring the patient has clean water, good food, and clean surroundings; this helps protect the patient from disease and contaminants. \

Dr Patricia Benner's Nursing Theory: From Novice to Expert Concept. These different skill levels show changes in performance: nurses use past experiences to guide actions; changes in the learner's perception of the situation; and the provision of the best care and safety for patients, which are refined and expanded by experience and clinical expertise.

Virginia Henderson's Nursing Theory: Need Theory. The theory was covering physiological, psychological, spiritual, and social needs. It helps nurses to demonstrate decision-making, professionalism, and quality of care to patients despite the workload experienced in clinical practice.

Conceptual Framework

Human Factors Engineering Perspective: The Systems Engineering Initiative for Patient Safety (SEIPS) model is a model of work systems and patient safety, structural/organizational characteristics of health care work systems, such as nursing workload, and how it can affect quality of care and patient safety.

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative research study examined the impact of workload as experienced by general ward nurses on patient safety while ensuring the quality of care.

Research Design

This study uses a qualitative approach to analyze the workload experiences of general ward nurses and how they impact patient safety. The study employed a descriptive phenomenological design in a selected area in Rizal Province,

Research Steps

The research instrument utilized an interview guide with semi-structured interview questions, a qualitative data-gathering technique in which the researcher poses a sequence of planned but open-ended questions to informants, and the guide may be incredibly detailed, with carefully phrased questions.

Data Collection and Sample Selection

The data gathering procedure involved securing approvals from the hospital's administration and nursing department to identify and select general ward nurses using a purposive sampling method. Informed consent will be obtained from each participant. The research-made questionnaire will be distributed to the selected nurses during their shifts, ensuring minimal disruption to their duties, and they will answer the questions via interview using audio recording lasting around 15-30 minutes.

Data Analysis Methods

The data analysis that will be utilized in the study is the Descriptive Phenomenological Analysis, specifically the Colaizzi Method. Colaizzi's (1978) distinctive seven-step process provides a rigorous analysis, with each step staying close to the data.

Study Limitations and Ethical Considerations

The study limitations and ethical considerations were selected to be followed to avoid any issues regarding the rights and identity of the participants. The statements to be collected from the participants are from their lived experiences, personal encounters, insights, perspectives, and decisions. The researchers must guarantee participants' autonomy, anonymity, confidential recordings, informed consent, justice, no disclosure, and privacy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

SOP 1. What are the lived experiences of general ward nurses regarding workload in their clinical practice?

The findings revealed that the push and pull factors are motivational functions. As nurses, you have no choice but to provide quality care and promote patient safety. The participants described their experience that because of workload they felt stress, depression, burnout, physical and mental fatigue, and exhaustion.

SOP 2. How do general ward nurses perceive the effects of workload on patient safety and quality of care provided?

The findings revealed the general rocky road of nursing practice; it is a struggle or tough challenge. The participants described workload as undeniably heavy; they missed tasks because of limited duty hours, communication gaps with patients and colleagues, and risks of medication and documentation errors.

SOP 3. What coping strategies do general ward nurses employ to manage excessive workload while maintaining patient safety?

The findings revealed the bleeding wheel in nursing practice; it is a strict preventive measure. The participants said that, because of workload, the coping strategies nurses use are teaching patients and relatives how to cooperate, having good and open communication on duty, filing a leave of duty or doing absenteeism, always smiling, resting, and, importantly, praying.

SOP 4. What recommendations can be derived from lived experiences of general ward nurses to improve workload management, and enhance patient safety?

The findings revealed the light beyond the tunnel; it is a hope that one day it will end soon. The participants recommend having adequate staff, practicing safety practices, and promoting teamwork and leadership support.

SUMMARY

The qualitative research conducted in selected areas in Rizal Province revealed that the general ward nurses' workloads significantly reduce the quality of care and have an impact on patient safety. Nurses described that workload resulted in stress, burnout, physical and emotional fatigue, and missed tasks due to limited time of duty because of increased patients. Participants emphasized the importance of supportive leadership and organizational policies that promote staff well-being. Implementing workload assessment tools, offering stress management programs, and ensuring regular training on patient safety practices. Adequate staffing and workforce planning, improved nurse-to-patient ratios, Supportive management and leadership, Continuous professional development, Employee wellness and mental health programs, and strengthening patient safety initiatives. The concern for patient safety has been a priority, motivating proposals of international health policies, and leading to joint efforts of institutions, health professionals, and patients in order to reduce and effectively control the risks originating in the health services

CONCLUSIONS

The study concludes that the workload experienced by general ward nurses has a direct and significant impact on patient safety. Excessive workloads increase the risk of nursing errors, compromise the quality of patient care, and contribute to nurse fatigue and burnout. Adequate staffing, balanced workload distribution, supportive management, and efficient work processes are essential in promoting safer patient care. Addressing workload-related challenges benefits both nurses and patients by improving healthcare outcomes and reducing preventable adverse events. According to WHO, a safe health system is one that adopts all necessary measures to avoid and reduce harm through organized activities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are suggested: an Improved nurse-to-patient ratio, adequate staffing, flexible duty hours, regular training on patient safety practices, promoting paperless documentation, and ensuring supportive leadership, organizational policies, and programs.

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AI DECLARATION STATEMENT

AI-supported tools helped with grammar and structure in creating this article. No AI tools were used to collect, analyze, or interpret data; all authors are credited for their academic contributions.

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